

God Directs our Steps and Stops - Acts 16:6-12 - June 22nd, 2008

- Have you ever had God close a door that you believed was open, only to have him redirect you in a different way? You're not alone.
- The text before us is a lesson to us in how it is that sometimes God will direct our steps by directing our stops, if you please.

- This is perhaps one of the most intriguing passages in the Bible. For the first time, Paul is stopped by the Holy Spirit from preaching.

"This is one of the most mysterious sections of the Bible. It is a story of roadblocks, undercurrents, and crosscurrents in which Paul and his companions hardly knew what to do next. It is an account of brave but worried men struggling through a night of perplexing circumstances. It is a thrilling epic in a saga of trials which led to the dawn of a new day when the missionaries realized God knew exactly what He was doing."

Ivor Powell "The Amazing Acts" p. 270

- At first, it seems puzzling at best, until you see that God had a plan and a purpose for Paul in directing his steps and his stops.
- I found three ways, in our text, that God may choose to use in order to direct our paths according to His will and for His glory.

1. Physical Suffering (Verses 6-7)

6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.

v6 Paul, Silas, and now, Timothy continue on throughout Phrygia and Galatia, but are stopped by the Holy Spirit from preaching in Asia.

v7 Even when they arrive at the border of Mysia to enter Bithynia, they are not allowed to continue into what is now modern day Turkey.

Question: how did the Holy Spirit keep Paul from preaching the Gospel in that area?

Answer: it is believed that Paul suffered from a physical illness that may have permanently damaged his eyesight.

Galatians 4:13-16 13 As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. 14 Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. 15 What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. NIV

- This seems to make sense, because, as we'll see in a moment, Paul will seek out a physician by the name of, none other than, Luke.
- Also, when you consider how tenacious and fearless the Apostle Paul was in his zealousness, it would take something this drastic.

"Sometimes, to those of us who are stubborn and thick-headed like Paul, the Lord gives guidance through infirmities. I am not saying every illness is a word from the Lord. However, sometimes the Lord does, indeed, work through infirmities."

Jon Courson

"Sometimes the Lord deliberately lays people aside in order to teach, in sickness, the lessons they are too busy to learn in health."

Ivor Powell "The Amazing Acts" p. 270

Question: That may be "how" the Lord stopped him, but "why" did the Lord stop him from preaching the gospel?

Answer: It would seem that Paul was not the right person, this was not the right time, and Asia Minor was not the right place?

2. Heavenly Communication (Verses 8-10)

8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

v8-9 They end up on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in Troas where Paul has a vision of a Macedonian man begging him to come.

v10 After Paul has this vision, Luke says; "we" got ready at once and left for Macedonia concluding that God called "us" to preach there.

- It's believed that this is where Luke accompanied Paul as his personal physician because he now writes in the "first person."

"The change of person and the use of the words 'we,' and 'us,' show that Luke was now in Paul's company. Paul and Silas, Timothy and Luke, set forth to cross over into Macedonia as soon as the heavenly communication came. All servants of Christ should be thus prompt in obedience."

Charles Spurgeon

- Some commentators suggest that the "Macedonian man" may have been Luke himself, which is why God directed them to Troas.
- Had it not been for "heavenly communiqué" both back in Galatia and now in Troas, the Apostle Paul may not have met Dr. Luke.
- Had the Apostle Paul not met Luke, then we would not have this record we call the book of Acts, let alone the Gospel of Luke.
- Thank God for the "heavenly communication," and thank Paul for his obedience to God's "heavenly communication" through this vision.

Question: What is a vision is it like a dream?

Answer: It's God communicating with you. A dream may come while you are sleeping, but a vision will come while you are awake.

Question: Does God still “direct our steps” through visions?

Answer: Yes, however, it will always be according to, and a confirmation of God’s written Word.

“If I had to choose between the Word and a vision, I’d take the Word every time.”

Jon Corson

3. Greater Goals (Verses 11-12)

11 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. 12 From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

v11 From Troas, they sail across the Aegean Sea for Samothrace, then Neapolis and end up leaving the continent of Asia for Europe.

v12 They travel to Philippi and the major city of Macedonia according to Paul’s vision, and stay there for several days.

One commentator said it this way; “At the time, Paul probably had no idea of the greatness of God’s purpose. God wanted to give him a continent for Jesus, to give him a personal doctor, and to give all of us the man whom God would use to write more of the New Testament than anyone else did. God knows what He is doing when he says, ‘No.’ This moves Paul and his missionary team from the continent of Asia to the continent of Europe; this was the first missionary endeavor to Europe. The wisdom and greatness of God’s plan is beginning to unfold. In Paul’s mind, he wanted to reach a few cities in his region. But God wanted to give Paul a continent to win for Jesus Christ.”

“In this manner the gospel came to our quarter of the globe. Blessed be God that ever Paul was led to cross the sea; may other lands rejoice in missionaries of the cross who shall visit them from us.”

Charles Spurgeon

“Paul turned westward into Europe and it resulted in the evangelization of the West. Europe became, as a result, the greater center of Christianity. If Paul had been directed eastward, back the way he had come and on to India and China, how different would have been the history of the world.”

John Phillips “Exploring Acts” v. 2 p. 319

“Small opportunities are often the beginning of great enterprises.”

Demosthenes (Greek Orator)

Ephesians 3:20-21 20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, 21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.
KJV